

Thousands Rekindle Kennedy's Words, Fire

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They began arriving in the predawn darkness, more than three hours before the cemetery gates opened, drawn to the flame of a man and a time now 25 years past.

By yesterday evening, more than 20,000 had made the pilgrimage to Arlington National Cemetery to stand silently at John F. Kennedy's grave and watch the orange flames of the eternal torch reach upward.

"It's memories," said Col. Floyd James Thompson, a prisoner of war in Vietnam for nine years. "I can't explain why I came. It's memories. It's emotions, so much emotion."

Like Thompson, who flew here from Key West, Fla., for ceremonies marking the 25th anniversary of Kennedy's assassination in Dallas, thousands of others took time yesterday to relive, if only for a few moments, the early 1960s when a young president with bold ideas lit the flame of idealism not just in this country but around the world.

"He is a symbol of the last time the country felt young, buoyant," said Frederick G. Dutton, a Kennedy aide and former assistant secretary of state. The Kennedy years, he said, "were before Vietnam completely blew up, before Watergate, before Nixon. It was before a long period of difficulty We go back to the Kennedys for rejuvenation."

Dutton placed 46 roses at Kennedy's grave, one for each year the president lived.

John Kelly brought flowers too, a continual stream of floral arrangements his Arlington florist shop was asked to deliver to the cemetery. "Some of them are from famous people, and some are from people who just loved him," Kelly said.

As thousands filed past the grave—some praying, others reading or reciting aloud his most famous phrases—1,500 people showed up for a 1 p.m. commemorative service at St. Matthew's Cathedral, where Kennedy's funeral mass was held on Nov. 25, 1963.

Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis and her two

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Thousands Recall Kennedy's Challenge

KENNEDY, From A1

children, Caroline and John Jr., attended a private mass yesterday in New York City.

The slain president's youngest and only surviving brother, Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.), placed a single white rose at a memorial to the president at Runnymede, England, where the Magna Carta was signed.

Kennedy's mother, Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy, 98, spent yesterday at the family compound in Hyannisport, Mass.

All around the globe, people remembered.

The mayor of West Berlin, where Kennedy delivered an impassioned speech at the Berlin Wall in June 1963, said yesterday that the president's words were "unforgettable" and had "helped cement the self-confidence of Berliners."

Vatican Radio recalled the assassination as a "tragic event that shook the world and that hit at the heart of the American dream."

Although no official ceremonies were held in Dallas, about 2,500 people came to Dealey Plaza, where Kennedy was shot while riding in an open limousine. A bouquet of flowers placed at the site bore the note: "We still miss you—Nov. 22."

At St. Matthew's, the Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh, a former Peace

Corps adviser and president emeritus of Notre Dame University, told the hundreds of former Peace Corps volunteers who had gathered: "I think if [Kennedy] were standing here today, his hair probably white like mine, he would say, 'You are the people that took the best message that I gave to the world . . . You understood what it meant to serve.'"

John Coyne understood. Coyne, who spoke at yesterday's service, was at the University of Michigan in 1959 and heard Kennedy talk about his idea of winning the hearts and minds of people in other countries through American volunteers.

Coyne signed up for the first class and went to Ethiopia. Before Coyne left, Kennedy called his group to the White House. "He asked us to write and tell him how it was going. Then he grinned and added, 'No postcards.'"

With this flashback to the light-hearted, charming Kennedy way, several in the church began weeping.

"He changed my life," said Cynthia Reeser, a project manager for an international health and nutrition program. "He told us to use our gifts in the best way, doing what was best for the world."

Kris Balderston, a lobbyist for the State of Massachusetts who wore a 1960 Kennedy campaign button to the cathedral, said Ken-

nedy "inspired you to change the world. It sounds corny today, but that's what he did."

Journalist Bill Moyers, a former deputy director of the Peace Corps, recalled the 1960s in his tribute to Kennedy: "I hear the sounds of crowds cheering and cities burning, of laughing children and weeping widows, of nightriders, nightmares and napalm, of falling barriers and new beginnings and animosities as old as Cain and Abel . . ."

"But something survived those years which bullets could not stop. An idea survived, embodied in the Peace Corps . . . Out there, John F. Kennedy might say, is the new frontier."

Above all, according to Aline St. Denis, a Dominican nun born in 1917, the same year as JFK, Kennedy motivated people and made them feel young. "He took the best out of you," she said. "He inspired each person to be better than they thought they could be."

Ted Fields, a 39-year-old environmental engineer who was visiting family in Alexandria, said that as he stood at Kennedy's grave yesterday, the president's words came rushing back.

"You know, a lot of us took jobs and told ourselves we were doing good, but we really weren't," Fields said. "I'm thinking about going in the Peace Corps."